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SUBJECT: BALOCHISTAN (6): THE NATIONALIST INSURGENCY

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 14349
[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 16269
[1](#)C. ISLAMABAD 16944
[1](#)D. ISLAMABAD 16962
[1](#)E. ISLAMABAD 16987
[1](#)F. ISLAMABAD 16994
[1](#)G. IIR 6 873 0346 06
[1](#)H. IIR 6 873 0344 06
[1](#)I. ISLAMABAD 17546

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter W. Bodde,
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary/Introduction: Despite widespread disillusionment with Islamabad, the most recent tribal uprising led by Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti is a localized insurrection, in which the Nawab had rhetorical support from Baloch nationalists, but little concrete backing in the province-at-large. The Government of Pakistan (GOP) responded with a hard line, eschewing negotiations and using the Army and Frontier Corps (FC) to physically isolate Bugti and his fighters. Tribal militants relied on sabotage, especially of gas pipelines, and ambush to attack GOP forces and development projects. While many Baloch -- and Pashtuns in the province -- are sympathetic to Nawab Bugti's cause, support is tempered by the belief that he fought for personal gain, rather than the province's welfare, and that his tactics of destroying economic infrastructure hurt the people of the province as much as the government. This cable on the insurgency is the sixth in a series on the current political situation in Balochistan. End summary/introduction. (Note: This cable was researched before the death of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti on August 26, 2006. (Ref C) End note.)

[1](#)2. (C) The latest Baloch tribal insurrection erupted in early 2005, as Nawab Bugti, leader of the Bugti tribe, used the rape of a female doctor at the Sui gas facility as a pretext to attack the government in and around his home district of Dera Bugti. The government responded with force, significantly enlarging the Frontier Corps (FC) and Army presence in the area. A cease-fire was reached and largely implemented by April 2005, but tribal attacks on gas pipelines, electricity pylons, train lines, and other

infrastructure continued. The fighting picked up in December 2005, when Marri tribesmen were linked to the December 14 rocket attack on President Musharraf as he visited an FC base in Kohlu, the proposed site of an Army cantonment in the heart of Marri territory.

The Tactics

13. (S) The paramilitary FC has spearheaded this latest crackdown, backed by military air power and army artillery. The security forces first moved to secure the gas fields at Sui and Loti in Bugti territory. Subsequently, they took control of coal fields to the northwest. Most fighting has been confined to the ethnically Baloch districts of eastern Balochistan, in particular Dera Bugti and the adjacent Kohlu district. The tribal militants rely on hit-and-run tactics against "soft targets," especially unguarded stretches of gas pipeline. According to DAO-Islamabad, the militants do not have the firepower for a head-on confrontation with the security forces. (Note: That said, the insurgents can use their limited arsenals quite effectively, as illustrated by the December 2005 attack on a helicopter carrying FC Commander Major General Dar, wounding him in both legs. End note.) While many attacks on economic installations have been blamed on the "Balochistan Liberation Army," a nom-de-guerre associated with Nawab Marri, fighting in recent months seems to have been conducted exclusively by Nawab Bugti's fighters.

14. (S) The GOP response to the insurgency has been overseen

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by the Director General of Military Intelligence, Nadeem Ijaz, a Musharraf protégé. Supported by other high-ranking military leadership, he eschewed calls for negotiations with Nawab Bugti. The government tactics were to initially attack the militant hideouts or strongholds with helicopter gunships and/or fighter-jets, and then to follow up with ground forces. According to DAO-Islamabad, the military has been reluctant to engage the militants at night, despite being equipped with and trained in the use of night-vision devices and night operations using helicopters.

15. (C) The Army and FC have moved steadily, if slowly, from road to road, ridge to ridge, to hem in Bugti's forces. The scarcity of water in the province slowed operations, but the sustained advance drove many Bugti fighters to surrender. Throughout the summer, Bugti "commanders" with two or three dozen men and their weaponry surrendered to the government on a regular basis. Some Embassy contacts have been skeptical about the reported surrenders by Bugti's warriors: an ethnic-Pashtun interlocutor told poloff that the reported surrenders were "all propaganda," reminding him of the "false stories" about Bengali militants surrendering to GOP forces in East Pakistan in the years immediately before Bangladesh's independence. The August edition of the newsmagazine "The Herald" asserted that the government has provided cash payments and renovated homes to entice militants into surrendering.

16. (S) The government now controls roads and key districts, through a combination of troop deployments and the reintroduction of cooperative tribes, many of whom were driven out of the area by Nawab Bugti during past insurgencies prompted by GOP moves to tap the region's natural resources. For example, the Kalpar Bugtis are one of at least four tribes moving back into the region with GOP assistance. Originally, the dominant Bugti sub-tribe in Sui, the Kalpars took advantage of the economic benefits the gas fields provided. When they began to assert themselves in the 1980s and early 1990s, they ran afoul of Nawab Bugti, who drove thousands of Kalpars off the land. Now the government is using the Kalpars and other tribes to backfill the towns

in which they have taken control.

¶7. (U) On August 24 (two day's before Nawab Bugti's death in an assault by GOP security forces), government-allied Bugti sub-tribes held what was described as a "first-ever" tribal jirga in Dera Bugti. Thousands of tribesmen attended the jirga, at which they declared the end to the Nawabi system and pledged their support to the government, according to press reports. Traditionalists have rejected the jirga's declaration: the hereditary Khan of Kalat asserted that the jirga's declarations would have no impact on tribal traditions and that the tribal system was becoming stronger with the passage of time, not weaker.

Development as a Weapon

¶8. (C) The DGMI has told DAO that an important element in marginalizing the militants is the construction of infrastructure in the province, including roads. The FC has plans to build school in the Balochistan. The military is pressing forward with the construction of cantonments at Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Sui, and Gwadar. These cantonments are a major source of antagonism between the Baloch tribes and Islamabad, as they provide a base for the GOP to assert authority in the province. Akhtar Mengal, a former chief minister in the late 1990s and son of nationalist leader Sardar Attaullah Mengal, said that "the cantonments are there to crush Baloch nationalists."

¶9. (S) The GOP sought to isolate Nawab Bugti and the other sardars politically, even as it waged a ground-and-air war

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against the insurgents. The DGMI provided DAO with a gruesome pictorial report titled "Terror in Balochistan," documenting those killed and injured -- including young children -- by insurgent attacks, as well as sabotage to infrastructure such as gas pipelines, electricity pylons, and train tracks. President Musharraf has publicly accused Nawab Bugti and the two other sardars selfishly opposing provincial development that would benefit Balochistan and the nation. In his July 20 televised speech to the nation, Musharraf indulged in an extended tirade against Nawab Bugti, signaling his disgust by saying that he would no longer accord Bugti the title of Nawab (prince). Musharraf vowed that Baloch militants would not derail development, saying, the GOP must "establish the writ of the government and end the writ of the sardars...security is paramount to our development schemes."

Alliance with Taliban or al-Qaeda?

¶10. (C) Embassy contacts were nearly unanimous in stating that Nawab Bugti and the other Baloch sardars would not form an alliance with either the Taliban or al-Qaeda. Poloff was repeatedly told that the Baloch are secular and liberal, including the sardars. "Our national interests clash with the mullahs," said Dr. Hayee Baloch, a non-tribal nationalist leader from the Makran Coast. "We are 100 percent against the mullahs." This antipathy stems, in part, from the perception among the Baloch that the ulema either are supporters of Pashtun interests or are backers of Islamabad's interests. Even Sarwar Kaker, a moderate Pashtun PML Senator, acknowledged that the GOP has used the mullahs over the years to undercut Baloch nationalist political parties...a tactic the Baloch will not forget.

The Baloch Weapons' Suppliers

¶11. (S) The Baloch militias appear to be buying their weapons from smugglers from Afghanistan, according to Embassy

contacts. These weapons are being run into the country by hard-core criminal gangs, said Director General of the National Police Bureau Muhammad Shoaib Suddle, who served three tours with the police in the province. "They are not doing it for tribal affinity; they are doing it for money." The DGMI says it is easy to get weapons from narcotics traffickers in the region. The GOP worries that Afghanistan and India, the latter through its consulates in Afghanistan and Iran, are providing funding and lethal aid to the Baloch insurgents. (Note: Embassy has no evidence that India is providing support to the Baloch insurgency through its consulates in Afghanistan and Iran. End note.) Indian financial assistance to the Baloch nationalists, if it exists, could also be funneled through Baloch expatriates in the Persian Gulf states who remit funds to the province.

Support for Nawab Bugti -- How Broad?

¶12. (C) While many in the province understood Nawab Bugti's battle against the central government, not all supported his methods. Some embassy contacts noted that, in an underdeveloped province, the militants were destroying what little economic infrastructure existed. Journalists in Quetta told poloff in August that common people believe that Nawab Bugti exploited national grievances for his own purposes, hindering development to maintain his control over his tribe. A contact in the National Police Bureau described Bugti as fighting by himself, with the support of only a few Marri; the Mengals had already distanced themselves from him.

¶13. (C) Senator Mahmood Khan Achakzai of Balochistan of the Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), thinks that Nawab

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Bugti miscalculated in challenging the government, saying that the Bugtis were not prepared for a sustained fight. Given the Nawab's history of switching to the government's side, Achakzai believes that the Nawab expected a minor show of force would lead to more government concessions. (Note: In 2005, the Pakistani military's top spokesman said the government paid Nawab Bugti millions of rupees annually, as well as fringe benefits, because of the gas fields in Bugti tribal territory. End note.)

Comment

¶14. (C) Comment: Only a few weeks before his death, Embassy interlocutors portrayed Nawab Bugti as a revered nationalist leader, but one on the verge of passing from the political scene. Even Baloch nationalist leaders, while praising Bugti's leadership over the decades, had little positive to say in early August about his last battle against the government. While some in Balochistan believe the GOP intentionally picked a fight with Bugti, all understood that Islamabad intended to subdue him first, before turning to the Marri and Mengal tribes, in order to ensure that federal development projects and foreign investment could move ahead. End comment.

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